NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS
Quarterly Report

Vol. I, No. 1 Supplement March 1949

Digest of Talks at Annual Meeting, November 4-5, 1948

Historical Preservation in France

Henri Bonnet
French Ambassador to the United States

The work which the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings has so happily started is privileged in being intensely interesting, both in its performance for its contemporaries and in its enormous importance for future generations. For centuries of their history, nations have been all too slow to awaken to their duty to preserve the patrimony of culture and beauty and art inherited from the past. Fortunately, more and more interest is being attached to the great enterprise of conservation, and it is comforting indeed to see that you have decided to coordinate and strengthen the measures already taken in your country for the protection of your historic sites and buildings. It is a natural instinct in any civilized society to take pride both in preserving and enriching its common patrimony. The systematic care of historical monuments began in France only a little more than a century ago. Today more than 12,000 sites and monuments are under the control of the Historical Monument Service and are maintained through a special chapter in the national budget. About 15,000 other buildings are afforded special protection and cannot be modified or even repaired without authorization. The Historical Monument Service is more than an administrative department; the members constitute a learned society, making a continuous and great contribution to the progress of history and art. During the last two world wars they saved a number of the most beautiful buildings in the country. Today, delicately restoring according to the best and most modern principles, they are saving thousands of structures badly damaged during the war. So, out of the sadness of devastation comes bright and encouraging hope. I am profoundly convinced that a great lesson can be found in these wonderful museums under the open skies which the preceding generations have bequeathed us. Nothing, in my judgment, can inspire greater confidence in the future of civilization than the contemplation of the marvels accomplished by our forefathers in our various lands. Those achievements were made possible only by the unceasing faith in the hearts of men. It is impossible - I should say inconceivable - that, when new resources and new possibilities are constantly being offered to us, we should fail to live up to the teaching of the past and should let the forces of destruction overcome the world. The proofs of genius displayed by man throughout the centuries furnish an infallible guarantee of the great future of humanity.

Historical Preservation - Issues and Problems, 1948

Kenneth Chorley
President, Colonial Williamsburg, and Vice President, National Council

I have always felt that one can and ought to divide the problem into two major categories - the "how" of restoration and the "why" of restoration. To me the "why" is the most important side and I shall confine my remarks to it. To preserve, restore, reconstruct an historical structure, battlefield, fort, or whatever it may be, is important, but it is not the end. It is the means to the end. The end is what we do with these areas after we have restored them. Everybody charged with the preservation

or restoration of an historic site should ask themselves two questions: Having completed the physical restoration, what shall we do with it; and what is its significance? Colonial Williamsburg is a reminder that one of the greatest faiths of all the ages of civilized man is the faith we know today as democracy. It was one of the important stages on which the beginning in this country of the endless struggle for freedom, liberty, justice and representative government was played out for all the world to see. It is our hope that millions of Americans will walk the streets of Colonial Williamsburg and find themselves in the time of our great beginning and be reminded of the ancient heritage of our ideals. To place the necessary actors on the stage to convey our message, there has been a complete shift in emphasis and objective toward the importance of our Division of Education. Our first responsibility is to the audience that comes to Williamsburg and we hope through our program of interpretation to make Colonial Williamsburg a living and vital force. We are now studying ways and means of taking the Williamsburg message to the millions of Americans who cannot visit. There is a great opportunity, a great challenge, a great responsibility for a carefully developed program of interpretation for every person working in the field of preservation at a time when enlightenment, guidance, and help is most needed. I am greatly in favor of the development of a National Trust, of a revolving fund, of having the National Council become a clearing house for information relating to this field, for disseminating advice and supplying data on preservation. But it can render an even greater service by taking the leadership in the development of a campaign to educate officials and the public in general to the necessity of preserving our historic sites and structures through the press, magazines, radio, television, and all other media. I should like to see every individual and organization in this country interested in such a program cooperating with the National Council by contributing brains and money. If we really believe in this, and if we really think it is important, let's stop nibbling at the cherry: let's make the National Council the spearhead of such a campaign. It can be accomplished collectively. Only tomorrow it will be too late!

Preservation of Federal Architecture in Washington, D. C.

Gilmore D. Clarke
Chairman, Commission of Fine Arts, and Ex-Officio Member, National Council

I shall discuss with you a few of the problems related to the preservation and rehabilitation of important monuments presented to the Commission of Fine Arts during the past few years. The first problem concerns the Capitol of the United States, where both legislative chambers need remodeling. Plans for reconstruction have been completed and when they are carried out, I assure you that they will provide thoroughly appropriate and notably distinguished chambers, in every respect suitable for the high purposes which these rooms serve. The details of the second problem, to replan the setting of the notable Washington Monument, have not been worked out, but we are hopeful that they will soon receive the attention of one of our most competent architects with a sculptor of outstanding reputation. The Commission of Fine Arts on several occasions have aided in preventing the damming of the Great Falls of the Potomac River, once called the "single remaining untouched remnant of nature's achievement in this region." We must be eternally vigilant against further effort to destroy Great Falls and the valley above and below. There are also quasi-public and private buildings of historic value and interest that deserve your attention, like the Latrobe-designed St. John's Church opposite Lafayette Park, the reconstruction of the Francis Scott Key home, and the new zoning amendments to preserve the integrity of Georgetown. This Council has much important work to do. I shall count it a privilege to have a small part in whatever you undertake.

The Importance of Perpetuating the Nation's Historic Heritage

Newton B. Drury
Director, National Park Service and Ex-Officio Member, National Council

There is a public need for a central organization like the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings to coordinate and weld together all sorts of historic interest and activity throughout the country. The National Park Service displays the "pageant of America," but it needs the support and guidance of a national organization disassociated from Government. The Federal Government, as represented by the National Park Service and other agencies, cannot attempt to carry the whole load; without a strong national, non-Governmental organization that can rally all the forces of historic and cultural conservation, there will be unrealized opportunities to preserve sites and structures that, if destroyed, will represent one of the great losses in our national culture. The extent and diversity of the historical treasures of the United States are so great that only through extensive local and private action, as well as action at various Governmental levels, can the vital opportunities now before us be undertaken. Any traveler can observe the evidences of quickened interest locally and regionally in the preservation of the ancient landmarks that give each community its individuality. The people that has no regard for its past will have no future worth remembering; only that community that preserves its landmarks has the sense of stability that comes with having roots in the past. This is a great educational cause, a cause which makes for the enrichment of our national culture through the keeping alive of traditions of the past by preserving the physical evidence of that past. As Winston Churchill once said, "there is nothing more important in the education of a people than the study of the history of the past with all of its tragedies and all of its inextinguishable hope."

The Present and Future Role of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings

David E. Finley
Director, National Gallery of Art and Chairman of the Executive Board, National Council

We would do well to model ourselves in some respects, but not entirely on the English National Trust and The Trustees of Public Reservations in Massachusetts, for the situation has changed since they were founded before 1900. Since that time there has been a great awakening in this country to the necessity of safeguarding our natural resources. In view of what is being done by the Federal Government and by some states, we do not need to shoulder so much responsibility. Still we must not expect the Federal Government to do all the work of historic preservation; much of it is our own responsibility. The organizations that came together in 1947 to form the National Council did so because they realized there was a no-man's land in the field of historic preservation in which the National Council and its proposed subsidiary, the National Trust, could do useful and important work. The Trust will provide a legal entity which can assume title to donated properties, which can be operated either by the Trust or some delegated qualified organization. It can set up criteria for classifying historical or architectural monuments; It can list these properties. It can try to induce Congress and the various states to pass helpful legislation. In an age when Americans in fast-moving motorcars with time on their hands and nowhere to go, are crowding the roads, it is our business to provide objectives which they can visit and enjoy and from which they can take home a better understanding of history. We must enlist the interest and cooperation of public-spirited bodies and leave nothing undone to bring about a realization that a monument, properly preserved and well-shown, can be a source of revenue. Such

a program needs intelligent planning and constant activity by an adequate staff. A steady revenue must be derived from many modest dues. Perhaps our most important role will be that of educating people to value and enjoy our own American heritage. This is especially true at this time when America and everything she stands for is under attack by ruthless militant nations that do not believe in our American way of life. Here in America a man has always had freedom to choose what is most worthwhile in the cultural life of his time. We shall defend his right to choose, even to choose badly. But we owe it to all Americans to offer criteria on which, in time, they can base an informed judgment. To do this we must preserve our great monuments of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Historic preservation is part of the battle we are fighting in America today for the kind of world that generations of Americans have paid with their lives to preserve for us.

Registered National Landmarks

Eric Gugler
Architect and Charter Associate, National Council

One of the impressions that I get from our general setup is that someday this organization is going to be tremendously powerful and wealthy, but that there is going to be an interim between this time and then - that "then" being perhaps 10 years, 20 years hence. And I would like to talk about that little area of time and what methods and devices can be used for saving buildings. It might be possible to get out a little parchment statement which could be given through the local society to the owner of any building which that local society thought was a landmark worthy of our respect. Even if too many were put around, I don't think they would do particular harm. We might have five or six different types of documents, and the people would be proud of them and would feel the knowledge of the importance of their houses. This would be inexpensive; it would make the local societies our friends. At the same time the owner would agree that should the building be in jeopardy, he would let us know so that we might proceed to the degree we could. We could also use lecturers or prepare slides or a series of articles to tell about the devices to save buildings - like turning one into a children's library, or, as a last resort, to move a building. There are many ingenious devices done on a humble basis that could be told about in pleasant little lectures. These would generate enthusiasm and effort and provide an outlet for the great many people who are inarticulate but fully as interested as we are.

The Salvage Archeology Program

Dr. Frederick Johnson
Delegate of The Society for American Archaeology to the National Council

It is now rather well-known that the Federal Government has embarked upon an unprecedented and farsighted program for the purpose of developing the river valleys of the nation. Some years ago archeologists became aware of the fact that the many reservoirs authorized would inundate aboriginal sites, from which come our knowledge of the history of these people. Because private organizations could not meet the emergency, a Government program to salvage archeological materials was set up four years ago, the National Park, Bureau of Reclamation, Corps of Engineers, and the Smithsonian Institution cooperating on setting up archeological survey. It has even been possible to carry on several detailed excavations, but this essential part of the program has been severely curtailed by lack of funds. To this work private organizations have contributed. Formed by archeologists, the Committee for the Recovery of Archeological Remains has assisted and

supplied advice. In the face of disappointingly small appropriations, the situation now is becoming acute. Increased appropriations are necessary to meet the tendency to speed construction work. We are in hope that funds for excavation of only 5% or less of selected sites will be available before it is too late. Archeological salvage problems may seem at first sight to be divorced from the interests of this Council. Actually, there is a mutual interest in preserving at least a record of the representative features of the history of the continent and of the succeeding generations of people who occupied and developed it. There are also times when archeologists enter into the field which is of direct interest to the Council. It is here especially that one endeavor can complement the other so as to record and otherwise preserve data of value to future scholars or of interest to the idly curious.

Those Beautiful Old Houses Were Never Like This!

Miss Nancy V. McClelland
Delegate to National Council of American Institute of Decorators

I wonder what the title of my talk means? Can it possibly be a jibe at those of us who have labored long and earnestly to bring order out of confusion and beauty out of ugliness in rehabilitating old houses? Does it mean to decry the perfectionists who sometimes go a few steps too far in recreating the picture of a past day? Perfection is certainly to be desired, but in less famous houses with backgrounds crowded with different personalities, it is almost impossible to restore them so that they will mirror faithfully the whole of the life they have led. I am going to tell you about one beautiful old house which never was as it is today - the old Jumel Mansion in New York City. After it was rescued by the Daughters of the American Revolution, we were called upon to help. Built by Robert Morris for his bride, Mary Philipse; used by Washington and later the British as headquarters; a tavern; and finally the home of Stephen Jumel, it made me feel as if we were besieged by the ghosts of all the people who had lived here. Only Washington's ghost gave us no trouble, for we retired him to a small office on the second floor. The ghost of Mary Philipse, charming and well bred, we kept on the first floor, in the reception room and the tea room. The ghost of Eliza and her two husbands, Stephen Jumel and Aaron Burr, we relegated to the second floor, although we knew very well that beautiful old house was never like this! It was amazing to see the interest that the public took in this restoration. The attendance doubled and tripled. People motored from every part of the country to see it. The fascination that restorations still have for people today is clearly shown by the increasing number of visitors. The President of Fordham College said recently, "How much we need the past is obvious. All true civilization is 90% heirlooms and memories - an accumulation of small but precious deposits left by countless generations that have gone before us." And restorations of this sort which are open to the public are the things that are helping to form the taste and the outlook of the generation of today - even if some of those beautiful old houses were never like this!

Report of Committee on Organization of the National Trust

H. Alexander Smith, Jr.
Chairman of Committee

Your committee proposes the immediate creation of a National Trust, with the general objective "the preservation and interpretation of sites and structures significant in American history and culture." Its sole function will be the executive implementation of

that objective. Immediate steps should be taken to introduce an appropriate bill into the next session of Congress. Congressional charters have been granted to similar quasi-public organizations and it would be fitting that the National Trust should join distinguished predecessors. Such a body is necessary because the agencies of the Federal Government cannot do the job. The problem is one of voluntary private cooperation, a matter of immediate emergency that cannot safely wait upon the turning of the wheels of departmental machinery. The present is a particularly opportune time for the establishment of a National Trust, which can serve as a watchdog of our historic heritage. Both the Government and the people will gain from any arrangement whereby a part of the heavy taxation may be avoided at the same time desirable preservation work is accomplished. The Trust will seek from Congress general, flexible, and comprehensive operating powers to deal with historical properties and temporarily with scenic properties. It will not request the power of eminent domain or of any direct Governmental financial participation. It will be governed by Trustees, the majority of whom would be elected from the membership of the National Council. Actual acquisition of historical properties should be the last resort; preservation by any other means, with the owner and his family in residence, should be the primary objective. Where acquisition is the only resort, sufficient endowment for maintenance or income-producing surrounding property should be obtained. In all cases of preservation through custodianship agreement, beneficial interest, or restrictive covenant, the owner should agree to the admission of the public at convenient times annually. The inducement, to be sought from Congress, is exemptions from Federal estate and gift taxes of properties turned over to the Trust. The advantages to the nation are that the properties would be maintained as living examples; they would be perpetually preserved; and their maintenance would be a minor problem. A bulwark of well-conceived criteria for the qualification of property will protect the Trust and re-assure Congress. To accomplish these ends there must be an immediate broad-scale program of public relations and education sponsored on behalf of the Trust. These proposals and such a program will start a snowball of public opinion in support of preservation that will return dividends of incalculable value in the strengthening of our democratic foundations and in the retention of our liberties and human rights against the onslaught of any alien ideology.